

A Critical Evaluation of the Development of a Strategic Target in a School Development

Plan: Actions, Impact, and Evidence-Based Reflections

The School Development Plan action point that I will be looking at is feedback, with an in-depth look at self-reflective feedback. Feedback was identified as a strategic target because one of the main themes of the school improvement plan: effective leadership, and compelling and coherent improvement planning. Within school X (the school will be referred to as school X in order to comply with BERA 2024) work scrutiny demonstrated that there was a lack of pupil action when feedback was issued and therefore by prioritising feedback pupils would get more out of feedback rather than just marking alone.

Within this essay, I will be looking at self-reflective practices and why they are important to pupil's development and improvement, the ways that pupil feedback can be used effectively in order to create progress and the practices that put this into effect. School X is a secondary school in South Wales with around 1223 pupils and an average of 16.8% of pupils with free school meals which is below the Welsh average of 22.8%. This school has a high percentage of additional learning needs students (ALN), in particular those with autism as there is a Communication Resource Base that specialises in this area, with a mainstream class that specialises in ALN with literacy and numeracy intervention.

The target of making feedback work can be linked to school X's Estyn report which detailed that one recommendation was 'Improve the quality of written feedback to pupils and their response to it' (Estyn 2016 p.3). Through the idea of making feedback work, school X is focused on how they form and format feedback as well as providing students the tools to be able to practically apply these practices. Furthermore there is an emphasis in peer feedback,

again demonstrated through the Estyn recommendations of ‘Where peer assessment is used, teachers do not prepare pupils well enough to enable them to assess the work of their peers meaningfully’ (Estyn 2016 p.7). The key word of this would be ‘meaningfully’, being able to use feedback in a meaningful way that enhances pupil progress was an emphasis of school X and one that was deployed through all departments as whole school training and a ‘whole school feedback policy,’ (School X 2024) not just a marking policy.

One of the main targets within school X’s is ‘make feedback work’. This is in line with the metacognitive approach that the school is beginning to implement. The importance of this is echoed by Jade Peace’s book ‘*What every teacher should know*’ ‘Formative feedback is feedback that aims to modify pupils’ behaviour or thinking to improve learning in the future’ (Pearce 2022 p.205). Formative feedback ‘helps students recognize gaps in their knowledge, areas to improve, what support resources they may need, and learning strategies they might change or adapt to meet the course outcomes’ (Stanford Teaching Commons, n.d.). School X echoes this with the aims of lesson planning and lesson progress, ‘To make progress even more visible with clear lesson objectives and success criteria in lessons and in programmes over time’ (School X 2024). Through creating feedback regularly throughout lessons, allowing for reflection based on objectives, aims and success criterias, allowing for easier self-reflection on both short form and extended pieces of writing. This is again echoed through the Education Endowment Fund, which believes, ‘There is evidence to suggest that feedback involving metacognitive and self-regulatory approaches may have a greater impact on disadvantaged pupils and lower prior attainers than other pupils,’ ((Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.). The theories surrounding metacognition are closely linked with resilience ‘Metacognition enables us to examine these thoughts critically, identify unhelpful patterns,

and replace them with more constructive ones' (Resilience Institute, n.d.). By allowing those students that are already disadvantaged or have apathy towards certain subjects etc, for example in subjects that are option based such as expressive arts and the humanities, tt ability to reframe their thinking when it comes to work completed through reflective and refractive thinking, allowing students to create and maintain progress in these subjects.

Feedback has been chosen because of the focus on the pupil rather than work. Echoing the idea of a process curriculum further by a larger focus on learning intentions/outcomes, with a notion of importance related to assessment *for* learning, rather than assessment *of* learning. The difference between the two is based on type of assessment. Assessment of learning is 'summative assessment, designed to evaluate students overall achievement and proficiency at the end of a learning period' (Thought Stretchers Education n.d) whereas assessment for learning is 'an ongoing, interactive process that takes place during the learning journey' (Thought Stretchers Education n.d). Feedback is more likely to occur during assessment for learning as it is able to happen on a more regular basis, for example after a piece of extended writing. Again, the importance of this is demonstrated by Shute as 'task-level feedback typically provides more specific and timely (often real-time) information to the student's current and understanding level' (Shute 2008 p.154). By having feedback as a part of lesson plans, allowing for reflection upon the success criteria or learning intentions during either each lesson or every couple of lessons, allows for understanding to be checked regularly as well as to understand if learning has taken place. The ways in which schools can regularly check understanding or demonstrate understanding is through modelling and WAGOLLS (what a good one looks like) allows students to see how they improve their work and reflect upon good examples.

One way that School X implements this is through DIRT which is directed and implemented improvement time and this is built into the curriculum, for example after end of term assessments or extended writing in the English department in particular. However, there are limitations to this, for example within practical subjects such as drama where there is no record of work, 'Practical work exists for the moment and once it is over it is gone. Fix It time in written work is a moment when students engage with reflection, make changes to their work and develop their understanding by reviewing feedback. All of that is visible because it happens to an existing piece of written work through annotations and notes' (Burt 2017), thus demonstrating the issues and limitations of allowing for specific feedback times in these subjects and ultimately demonstrating how it might not be viable.

Within the development plan, there is then a subject specific plan that details how the school will then further this implementation within subject areas. The time that has been for this target is not exact, however the school development plan is for three years with termly reviews that involve all staff to reflect on their professional practise. Within school X's departmental development plan, the English department has detailed how they put effective feedback into practice. For example, one way that feedback can be clearly evidently seen is through green and purple pen work. This is the most obvious way to distinguish what feedback is being presented as it is colour coded.

Self evaluation is demonstrated through the green pen work. Self reflection and the importance of it, is known, the emphasis of which teacher training has instilled in its participants. Something that is important is that 'developing self-assessment and feedback literacy requires space in the curriculum' (Yan 2022 p.1120). Curriculum for Wales supports

this because it is integral within curriculum because the main goal is high aspirations for all ‘overarching purpose within the curriculum is to support every learner to make progress’ (Welsh Government 2024). The new curriculum moves away from an ‘outcome’ curriculum and instead to a ‘process’ curriculum which means that instead of focusing on grades and results. This is echoed by the Welsh government who believes that learning needs to be meaningful not just about what can this child achieve in terms of grades and results, ‘A content-focused curriculum does not guarantee meaningful learning, only that certain topics are covered to varying extents; instead, the Curriculum for Wales guidance articulates what concepts and essence of learning should underpin a range of different topics, learning activities and acquisition of knowledge’ (Welsh Government 2024). Developing Feedback for Pupil Learning by Ruth Dann believes that ‘new approach to assessment should recognise the importance of developing pupils’ depth and breadth of learning, identifying gaps of knowledge that require further attention through learning’ (Dann 2013 p.22). The ‘depth’ of knowledge that Dann describes aligns with the four purposes of education promoting ‘ambitious capable learners’ (Welsh Government 2024) moves beyond the ideas of grades etc and more so into lifelong learning and ‘meaningful’ learning. School X using pupil voice determined that self assessment was one of the ways that pupils took the most amount of action during feedback. However, feedback cannot be effective without strategies surrounding it in order to scaffold and provide learners with a structure. Self assessment can be used when looking at one word or answers that have only clearly defined right or wrong answers. Another way is to provide a guide to mark against. For example, success criterias, if applied correctly, can be useful in allowing pupils to evaluate their own work but with scaffolding provided.

Another way that School X implements successful self assessment is to provide students with self assessment strips. Students were given pieces of paper, separated into boxes that detailed what each paragraph should contain and then how to mark against it. This is successful as students have a success criteria to compare against as well as allowing for students to participate and be active participants through their learning, again feeding into resilience. Education and therefore feedback needs to include actual participation from students in order to make feedback actually useful 'education is participatory (all participants are active) and that actions are situated in particular contexts' (Dann 2013 p.26). For participation to be achieved, strategies such as self reflection strips and using success criterias allow for students to actively participate in their reflections and feedback processes. However, one issue that can become prevalent within self assessment is falling into the trap of very standard 'what went well' and 'even better if', for example 'I have good handwriting' and 'I could write more'. By having specific and clear detailed ways that students can examine their own work means that 'self assessment is an important learning practice that students use to monitor and improve learning' (Yan 2022 p.1118). One issue, however, which may discredit the effectiveness is 'Self assessment can be subjective because students may not be sincere and may even over-evaluate their own performance'(Teaching and Learning Innovation Centre, n.d.) as suggested by Hong Kong University. Not only can students use peer assessment to make their work seem better than it is, it could also be the opposite for an individual perhaps with self esteem issues who could use self- assessment to be overly self-critical, especially if there is not a clear success criteria.

Feedback is evaluated by school X through multiple methods. One of these methods is through work scrutiny. By creating a sample of students and dedicating a day or two to evaluating work completed by students and paying particular attention to the feedback that

the school has been focusing on. School X uses work scrutiny to determine whether or not feedback has been used effectively as described by the improvement plan. The sample is usually students who fall under the vulnerable category, perhaps those who either don't attend school regularly etc and although it will be helpful to see those students progress 'absences from school can have negative effects on a child's education, including the loss of teacher-led lessons, peer interactions, and, ultimately, academic achievement,' (Dräger, Klein and Sosu, 2023 Drager p.2)and how feedback and marking is used to better their education, there are downfalls to only focusing on those students. For example, if they are primarily non-attenders then how can you see if feedback is being used effectively because these are students who are not in school to utilise it. Furthermore, if students cannot reflect on work consistently, with attendance figures in Wales 'The average attendance for this academic year to date for pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 85.3%, up from 84.9% over the same period in the 2023/24 academic year. For pupils not eligible for FSM the average attendance is 92.8%, up from 92.2%, ' (Welsh Government 2025) and use feedback to better future pieces of work because they are not in school to use the feedback from lesson to lesson , therefore the journey cannot be accurately monitored. Although attendance levels in general are higher than the pre pandemic fallout, if only focusing on students with poor attendance, it cannot portray an accurate picture.

Another reason why feedback may not be useful to student development and therefore school improvement is because feedback is not always helpful or useful, in particular for progress. In the article, 'Building Feedback Literacy: Students' Perceptions of the Developing Engagement With Feedback Toolkit' it determines that there are four ways that hinder effective feedback in students as 'Feedback is unlikely to have optimal impact if emphasis is placed solely on the ways in which educators craft feedback'(Winstone, Mathlin,

and Nash, 2019, p.2). If, as mentioned earlier within this essay, feedback does not let the student be an 'active participant' then they cannot use the feedback to improve. The articles breaks the issues of feedback into four different sections: 'awareness, representing students' difficulty decoding the language used within feedback' (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash, 2019, p.2), 'cognisance was used to represent students' difficulty in knowing which strategies they could use to implement feedback' (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash, 2019, p.2), 'agency, refers to students' difficulties in feeling empowered to act upon feedback,' (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash, 2019, p.2) and 'volition represents unwillingness on students' part to put in the "hard graft" required to realize the impact of feedback' (Winstone, Mathlin, and Nash, 2019, p.2). These are referred to as 'barriers' to effective feedback. Unless students are able to access or overcome these four barriers then students are unable to use feedback in order to improve their own work. Depending on students' level and ability, it then depends on whether or not they could overcome these barriers to effective feedback. The issue then arises with how to ensure that all students understand these barriers and how to overcome them. Furthermore, this presses the issue of time within teaching, especially with those who are teaching with the pressures of exams and qualifications that can control the rest of their lives. If in order to make feedback effective, you have to teach all these other things and where does this fit into a curriculum where there are very obvious time constraints?

In conclusion, the evidence does suggest that feedback is effective within secondary education as it allows pupils to actively work on their own work and be reflective on their practise. There are limitations with this strategy as outlined by the *Education Endowment Fund*, 'Providing feedback is a well-evidenced and has a high impact on learning outcomes' (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.) . It is something that schools can implement with quick results for very little cost. Furthermore, as well as the 'high impacts' it

also had the immediate or delayed return depending on what is suited to the task, 'Feedback can be effective during, immediately after and some time after learning. Feedback policies should not over specify the frequency of feedback'(Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.). These positives outweigh the negatives, particularly within School X's improvement plan because it already demonstrates that there have been successes, as outlined on staff training days through pupil voice with overwhelming positive responses from pupils.

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